

# Ex-Appeal



When it comes to love, who and what are you willing to sacrifice for it?

## 1

The ringing telephone awakened me. Still partially asleep, I reached over and clumsily felt around for the receiver. After knocking over a couple of items on my nightstand and swearing to myself, I rolled over, propped myself up on my elbow, and reached again for my telephone, which was now in full view. Head throbbing, from my overindulgence at the local bar the night before, it took me a couple of seconds to realize that the phone I was reaching for wasn't mine.

"What the—" I mumbled, jerking my hand back as if my mother had slapped it for trying to sneak one of her homemade peanut butter cookies. I quickly sat up in the bed. *OK, Sidney Michelle Foster, that's it. No more alcohol,* I promised myself as I pushed my hand through my hair. Maybe I was seeing things. I glanced back over at the still ringing telephone expecting to see my simple ivory-colored cordless phone instead of the black and silver monster of technology—with more buttons than an airplane control panel—still sitting on my nightstand. *No—that's not my nightstand,* I said to myself, *and this is not my bed.* I stared down at the cotton, hunter-green comforter I had wrapped myself up in. *Where in the hell was I?*

My rampaging thoughts were quickly interrupted when the phone rang again.

This time, someone in the other room answered it. "Hello," I heard a male voice say. A few seconds after that, I heard him laugh. Panicked, my gaze darted around the room as I tried to figure out where I was. *Dark walls, dark drapes, dark furniture.* OK, this definitely had to be a man's room, probably the stranger laughing it up in the other room. *Shit*—I mumbled to myself when I realized that I had never been there before. I had become the latest victim of the dreaded drunken one-night stand. Still clueless, I tried to remember what had happened the day before. *Let's see, Kristin got married and I got drunk. Yep that's it. That's what happened.*

My best friend had gotten married—again, and I was her maid of honor—again. Yep, that's right; I said maid and not matron. I was not married. My current marital status—or, more accurately, the lack thereof—was the reason I had tried to drink myself into oblivion the night before. After ditching Tony Welbourne, my date, who acted more like a horny seventeen-year-old by groping me every chance he got, than a thirty-two-year-old pharmacist, I headed for the nearest bar and threw myself a pity party.

Here, Kristin was on her second prince, and I was still kissing frogs. What was worse, was that I was obviously going home and sleeping with them without any recollection. Now, don't mistake my tone for bitterness. I was not bitter. I promise I wasn't. I was happy that my best friend had found her Mr. Perfect—again. I was just getting a *little* impatient waiting for my Prince Charming to arrive.

I thought I had found him once—a long time ago—but I was mistaken. I guess I should mention that the one man that I thought was my knight in shining armor turned out to be Kristin's knight. He was her first husband. They weren't married at the time. They didn't even know each other, but once Kristin laid eyes on him—this beautiful, mysterious hunk of a man—it was all over for the rest of us single gals. Tyler Richmond was his name, and he was the most beautiful man I had ever seen. He was—as cliché as it sounds—tall, dark, and handsome, with dark, wavy hair, warm, hazel eyes, and a smile that could charm a nun out of her habit, if he was so inclined.

Kristin and I met Tyler during our junior year at Tower University. She and I were attending a frat party when this tall, gorgeous, unassuming man casually strolled in and piqued my interest. Immediately, I was drawn to him, and not because he was the most beautiful man I had ever seen, but because he was different. He stood out from the other frat brothers. It was as if he didn't belong there, among the loud, beer guzzling, skirt chasing boys. Unable to take my eyes off him, I watched him, studied him, and damn near stalked him as he moved around the frat house enjoying the party atmosphere. After engaging in a few conversations with some of the other frat boys, he made his way toward the kitchen. I followed as I pushed through the mob that separated me from what I was sure, at the time, would be my destiny. As I studied him, I tried to blend in and remain as inconspicuous as possible. Unfortunately, my blending-in skills were not as good as I fancied them to be, and he spotted me. One second his back was to me as he slipped into the kitchen, and then in the next, he had spun around to confront me.

"Hello," he said, smiling down at me.

*Oh shit*, I said to myself as I tried to come up with a response. For some reason the words *hey*, *hello*, and *how are you doing* completely slipped my mind. So instead of speaking like any sensible human being would have done, I just stood there with an idiotic look of *oops* on my face.

He continued smiling, his hazel, almond-shaped eyes twinkling with delight. “Are you following me?” He stepped toward me.

“Who me?” I played dumb and tried to mask my guilt with a look of confusion.

“Yes you.” He seemed amused by the situation.

“No,” I lied. “I wasn’t following you. I was—”

“I think you were,” he interrupted as he raised one eyebrow. “And I think you’ve been following me ever since I got here.” He folded his arms across his chest and leaned against the kitchen counter. “And you’re not very good at it either.”

“You’re clearly mistaken,” I continued to lie. “I was just going to get a beer. It just so happened that we were going in the same direction.”

“Is that so?”

I could tell he didn’t believe me. “It is so,” I nodded.

“Well, don’t let me stop you.”

Just then, as if her last-decent-single-drop-dead-gorgeous-guy-on-campus radar went off, Kristin appeared. “Hey, Sid,” she sang out as she made her way toward us.

I glanced over at her, and her dazzling blue eyes were already delightfully dancing all over Tyler’s perfectly handsome face. Before I could say another word, she was already playfully twirling a few strands of her honey-blond locks around her index finger in her typical, trademark, go-home-girls-he’s-all-mine fashion. She tilted her head slightly to the side and mercilessly flashed him her sparkling-white smile. “Who’s your friend?” she asked, never taking her eyes off him.

*Poor fellow*, I thought. He never even saw it coming. Kristin was irresistible, and Tyler proved to be no different than any of the other heterosexual males on campus when it came to her mesmerizing gaze. He fell for her charm, beauty, and great sense of humor, and I was left—needless to say—holding her bridal bouquet at their wedding, a mere two years later. Three years after that, life wasn’t so peachy-keen at the Richmond’s home, and they divorced. Tyler wanted kids, and Kristin—who was all too eager to preserve her perfectly toned, not-an-ounce-of-fat-on-her body—didn’t. He walked. Two years after they split, Kristin was off on her second honeymoon with her second Mr. Right—who shared Kristin’s lack of desire to ruin her perfect figure by having kids—and I was waking up in a stranger’s bed.

“I’ll give you a call later,” the male voice in the other room said just before hanging up.

“Shit,” I swore under my breath as I threw back the covers to climb out of bed, only to find that I was completely naked. I snatched the sheets back up to cover myself. There, in a heap on the floor next to the bed were my clothes. It was all coming back to me. I had obviously gotten drunk and gone home with a stranger. I remembered leaving the reception after Kristin and Mason had said their good-

byes and left for their honeymoon. Feeling sorry for myself, I decided to go down to the local watering hole and drown my sorrows in alcohol, instead of my normal ritual of eating a huge bowl of butter pecan ice cream then working out for an hour on my elliptical machine in order to burn off the guilt of overindulgence.

Being that I was not much of a drinker, turning to booze for solace was not one of my brightest moments. I had obviously gotten loaded, grabbed the first man I saw, and fell into bed with him. OK, I was drunk. I clearly could not be held responsible for my actions, but this guy—this stranger who had taken me to his place and had his way with me—should have known better. What happened to gentlemen? Were there any left? What kind of guy would take advantage of a woman when she's in such a drunken state? Most men, I immediately decided.

Then I had another thought. *Did he use a condom? Did this jerk even have the common sense to use protection?* What if he didn't? What if this idiot was so caught up in getting laid, that he didn't even take the time to protect himself, or me? I could have gotten pregnant, or worse, contracted AIDS. Suddenly, I felt nauseous. How could I have been so stupid—so careless—all because Kristin was remarried, and I was left all alone? Well, I guess I shouldn't say I was all alone. I obviously made a friend last night.

*OK, Sid, I said to myself. Now how in the hell are you going to get out of here without your "new friend" being the wiser.* Quietly, cautiously, I slid out of bed, gathered my clothes, and tiptoed into the master bathroom. *Maybe I could sneak out without him seeing me,* I thought as I got my first look at myself in the mirror. *Ugh,* I looked horrible. My eyes were bloodshot, skin was pale with smudged makeup, and my fiery-red locks, which I had always considered my crowning glory, was—as near as I could tell—a home for a small family of birds. I quickly pushed my free hand through my hair in an attempt to make myself a little more presentable. After my hair began to bare some resemblance of the locks that I was usually so proud of, I hurriedly got dress. I wanted to wash my face, but the fear that my host would hear the water running, made me settle for good, old-fashion, always-there-when-you-need-it spit and some Kleenex that were conveniently sitting on the bathroom countertop. I quickly dabbed the Kleenex on my tongue and tried to wipe away as much makeup as I could. When finished, I tossed the Kleenex and returned to the bedroom in hopes of finding my three-inch heels.

In my haste to escape without being noticed, I almost didn't smell the wonderful aroma of bacon, spilling into the bedroom. The scent of breakfast made me realize how hungry I was. My stomach began to rumble with anticipation. *Sorry,* I said, looking down at my belly, *not today.* And then I pretended to talk to the stranger. *Oh yes, I would love to stay and have breakfast with you. Any other time, this would be great, but right now, I'm just trying to sneak out of here and save face because I acted like such a slut last night. You do understand, don't you?* How embarrassing, I mumbled.

After grabbing my heels, which I realized that I couldn't put on if I wanted to make a clean getaway, I moved over to the doorway and listened. Among the clinking and clattering of the pots and pans, I could hear my new friend humming as he worked. Still unable to remember exactly what happened the night before, I

hoped that if I got a glimpse of this guy before racing out the door, that some memory of the previous evening's events, would come back to me. As I edged my head out of the doorway, I silently prayed to myself, *please don't be a hideous monster. Please let me walk, or run away with some type of dignity.*

And then I saw him—well sort of. His back was to me as he stood in front of the kitchen sink rinsing off dishes. Wearing nothing but silk pajama bottoms, it was apparent that this stranger was no stranger to the gym. The golden tan that covered—what I suspected to be—every inch of his 6-foot 2-inch frame—made the tight, sinewy muscles of his broad shoulders, and back, stand out. His hair—which was as near as I could tell, raven black—appeared to have been curls that had been cut so closed that they now were smooth waves that tapered at the nape of his neck. *Not bad*, I told myself when I saw that he wasn't some hideous creature that I had pulled out the slums of hell. But that was just the back of him. He could have been blessed with a great body, but cursed with the face of Satan himself.

As he moved around the kitchen busying himself, with what I assumed to be the final details of breakfast, I somehow managed to tear me eyes away from his finely chiseled physique and checked out the rest of his surroundings. My eyes traveled over to the small round kitchen table. It was set for two. He apparently expected me to stay for breakfast. *Not going to happen*, I thought, but I would give him points for presentation. What I took to be his best china, was neatly placed on the table, complete with *real* matching silverware, two matching drinking glasses, filled with orange juice, two matching coffee cups, powder-blue napkins that matched the kitchen walls, and a nice vase of what appeared to be fresh-cut flowers as a centerpiece. *Who was this guy*, I wondered, *a Martha Stewart wannabe.*

My eyes went back to the stranger, who still hadn't turned around and graced me with his dashing good looks. He moved over to the toaster, removed four golden-brown slices of toast, and laid them on yet another matching plate. If I weren't so sure that I had gotten screwed royally, I would have guessed that this guy was gay. Maybe he was just a *Queer Eye* fan.

I quickly glanced at the front door as I tried to plan my escape. *It was now or never*, I told myself. The front door was only a few yards away, while his back was turned, I could quickly, but quietly make my getaway. *I'll never drink again*, I promised myself as I transferred my heels to the same hand that I was holding my purse in. My heart began to beat wildly as I took a deep breath, counted to three, and dashed toward freedom. As I made my way through the living room—nearly bashing my knee into the coffee table—I held my breath as if I was afraid that he would hear me breathing, turn around, and spoil my escape. Seconds later, I reached the door and grabbed the doorknob, but before I could taste freedom, I realized that I had been caught.

"Hey, Sid," the stranger's voice called after me. "Where do you think you're running off to?" I could tell by the playfulness in his voice—a voice that seemed vaguely familiar—that he was teasing me. At that very moment, I felt like shrinking into a puddle on the floor. I was so close, so close to freedom that could almost feel the fresh outdoors' air on my face. Slowly, reluctantly, I turned

around to see the man that had had his way with me while I was drunk out of my skull. When I saw him, I nearly fell over. I leaned against the door to steady myself. No wonder his voice sounded familiar. I knew this guy. He was no stranger. He was Tyler Richmond. He was my best friend's ex-husband. *Shit!*